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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 002291

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE (MENUTTI)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/09/2012

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SUBJECT: RUSSIANS IN ROME SAY ORTHODOX/VATICAN TENSIONS ARE
AT HIGHEST LEVEL IN YEARS

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON FOR REASONS 1.5 (A) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: OVER THE COURSE OF THE LAST FEW WEEKS, DCM MET SEPARATELY WITH FATHER MARCEL GUARNIZO, PRESIDENT OF THE AID TO THE CHURCH IN RUSSIA, FATHER FILIPP OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN ROME, AND DIMITRI SHTODIN, DCM AT THE

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RUSSIAN EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE. ALL ASSERT THAT RUSSIAN/VATICAN RELATIONS ARE AT A 10-YEAR LOW. FATHER MARCEL BLAMES IT ON THE INCREASING INSECURITY OF PATRIARCH ALEXI AND RUSSIAN ORTHODOX "FOREIGN MINISTER" KYRILL. FATHER FILIPP STATES THAT THE PROBLEM IS THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH'S "AGGRESSIVE" PROSELYTISM, WHILE SHTODIN SEES IT AS A MANIFESTATION OF AN ETHNIC RUSSIAN/ETHNIC POLE CONFRONTATION WITHIN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION. NONE OF THE THREE SEE ANY SHORT-TERM IMPROVEMENT. END SUMMARY

THE VIEW OF THE RUSSIAN CHURCH IN ROME

¶2. (C) THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN ROME WAS A SMALL, DISCREET CONGREGATION UNTIL THE LATE 1980'S. FOUNDED BY "WHITE RUSSIANS", IT USE TO EASILY ACCOMMODATE ITS LESS THAN 300 MEMBERS IN ITS CHURCH LOCATED IN THE CENTER OF ROME. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE INFUX OF SERBS, RUSSIANS, AND UKRAINIAN INTO ROME SINCE THE EARLY 1990'S, THERE WERE OVER 1,000 PEOPLE AT ORTHODOX EASTERN SUNDAY MASS ON MAY 5, WITH THE OVERFLOW CROWD FILLING THE SURROUNDING STREETS. THE CONGREGATION HOPES TO HAVE A SECOND CHURCH BUILDING ON THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY COMPOUND IN 2003, WHERE A LARGE CHURCH IS CURRENTLY BEING CONSTRUCTED. THERE ARE THREE PRIESTS AT THE CHURCH, FATHER FILIPP, FATHER MIKAIL, AND FATHER ALEKSEY. DCM MET MOST RECENTLY WITH FATHER FILIPP ON MAY 6 TO DISCUSS HIS PARTICIPATION IN EMBASSY'S MAY 15-16 ANTI TRAFFICKING CONFERENCE. FATHER FILIPP AGAIN USED THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMPLAIN ABOUT VATICAN ACTIONS IN RUSSIA. HE SAID THAT THERE WILL BE NO IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS UNTIL POPE JOHN PAUL II "LEAVES THE SCENE". HE SAID THAT THE CREATION OF CATHOLIC DIOCESE IN RUSSIA WAS A GREAT "INSULT" TO THE RUSSIAN CHURCH.

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WHEN ASKED IF THESE WERE NOT NECESSARY TO PROVIDE PASTORAL CARE FOR CATHOLICS LIVING IN RUSSIA, HE REPLIED THAT THIS ARGUMENT IS A VATICAN "LIE" AND COVER FOR AGGRESSIVE PROSTYELATION OF RUSSIANS. HE DESCRIBED RELATIONS AS WORSE THAN ANYTIME IN THE LAST 20 YEARS.

VIEW OF THE EMBASSY OF RUSSIA TO THE HOLY SEE

¶3. (C) DURING SEVERAL ENCOUNTERS WITH RUSSIAN EMBASSY DCM SHTODIN, DCM RAISED STATE OF RUSSIAN/VATICAN RELATIONS. SHTODIN, WHO VOLUNTEERED THAT HE IS A NON BELIEVER AND DID NOT FEEL PARTICULARLY CLOSE TO THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, AGREED ENTIRELY WITH THE SENTIMENTS VOICED BY FATHER FILIPP. HE SAW NOT ONLY THE CREATION OF DIOCESES AS AN AFFRONT, BUT WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS THE RECENT VATICAN "VIRTUAL INVASION" OF MOSCOW. ACCORDING TO SHTODIN, THE RUSSIANS WERE INFORMED THAT THE VATICAN WOULD DO A LIVE VIDEO LINK FOR THE POPE WITH SEMINARIANS AT THE CATHEDRAL IN MOSCOW. THE ARCHBISHOP OF MOSCOW, AGAIN ACCORDING TO SHTODIN, MADE IT A PUBLIC EVENT. SHTODIN SEES BOTH ETHNICITY AND POLITICS AT WORK ON THE VATICAN SIDE. HE SAID THAT A MAJORITY OF ROMAN CATHOLICS IN RUSSIA ARE ETHNIC POLES, AND THAT THOSE IN THE VATICAN WHO WANT TO RETARD PROGRESS IN VATICAN/RUSSIA RELATIONS ARE TELLING THE POPE THAT HIS CO-NATIONALS IN RUSSIA ARE BEING PERSECUTED AND THE VATICAN SHOULD THEREFORE TAKE AN AGGRESSIVE STAND. HE SINGLED OUT PRIME MINISTER SODANO AS BEHIND THESE ACTIONS, NOT BECAUSE HE'S CONCERNED WITH POLISH CATHOLICS IN RUSSIA, BUT TO GAIN SUPPORT IN ANTICIPATION OF THE NEXT CONCLAVE AMONG CARDINALS LOYAL TO JOHN PAUL.

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A ROMAN CATHOLIC'S VIEW

¶4. (C) FATHER MARCEL, PRESIDENT OF AN ORGANIZATION CALLED "AID TO THE CHURCH IN RUSSIA", CALLED ON DCM ON MAY 1. HE SAID THAT PERSECUTION OF ROMAN CATHOLICS IN RUSSIA IS AT

ITS WORST LEVEL SINCE THE FALL OF COMMUNISM. HE CLAIMED THAT THERE IS NO PROSELYTIZING, BUT IF AN ETHNIC RUSSIAN WANTS TO INVESTIGATE CATHOLICISM "HE MUST BE RECEIVED". MARCEL STRESSED THAT TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE PASTORAL SUPPORT FOR ROMAN CATHOLICS IN RUSSIA, IT IS NECESSARY FOR FOREIGN BISHOPS AND PRIESTS TO BE ALLOWED TO ENTER THE COUNTRY. HE MADE A STRONG PLEA FOR PRESIDENT BUSH TO MEET ARCHBISHOP TADEUSZ KONDRUSIEWICZ OF MOSCOW DURING THE PRESIDENT'S UPCOMING TRIP TO RUSSIA.

COMMENT: POST WOULD APPRECIATE HEARING FROM EMBASSY MOSCOW IF SHTODIN'S PERSPECTIVE IS SHARED BY MANY IN THE GOI. EMBASSY VATICAN IS CONVINCED THAT THE HOLY SEE HAS LEGITIMATE PASTORAL CONCERNS IN RUSSIA WHICH NECESSITATE THE PRESENCE OF FOREIGN PRIESTS. THAT SAID, THERE IS SOME INDICATION THAT THE VATICAN IS CALLING FOR A GREATER NUMBER OF PRIESTS PER CATHOLIC CONGREGANTS THAN IS THE NORM IN WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. AGAIN, EMBASSY MOSCOW'S VIEW WOULD BE WELCOMED.

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	INL-00
	DODE-00	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	VC-00	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01
	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00
	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00
	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00
	SAS-00	/009W					

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O 101442Z MAY 02
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY ROME

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END COMMENT. NICHOLSON

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